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STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL MOVEMENT ATD FOURTH WORLD

Reaching the poorest and allowing ourselves to be reached by them

1. Raised in an extremely poor family, Father Joseph Wresinski (1917-1988), founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, knew that children's unhappiness is without frontiers. No matter where they live, children deprived of their childhood and who are without hope for the future, owing to their families' acute poverty, have a right to protection by the international community and to resources for growth and development.

2. In 1987, Father Joseph made the following statement at the UNICEF Executive Board:

> "At this time we must admit that large groups of people are unaided in their efforts to safeguard their dreams. I think of all the children and families in all the countries of the world who are unreached by our programmes because they are not counted in our statistical tables and our global analyses. We know so little about the so-called 'landless' children and families, often without roots, destined to wander in poverty from place to miserable place ... I think of all the families who, without employment, have no way of feeding their children, who then, often, become street children ... I think of all the families in welfare hotels, pueblos jovenes, squatter villages and the ghost towns on all continents ... The children of these families reveal to us that in spite of everything, their parents convey their ideals and hopes to them. UNICEF has never abandoned these children. It has always tried to reach them, and has always given priority to their needs in international forums ... The international community has a burning obligation to

listen to these children. If our efforts have not always met with success, is it not also because our projects have not always been planned with these families, or chosen by them."

Strengthening the advance

3. The UNICEF Executive Board has taken this obligation seriously, and listened to these children and their families. Twice, in 1989 and in 1991, it adopted decisions entitled "Reaching the poorest", thus recognizing that identifying and reaching the poorest through its programmes is essential to improving the situation of children. The Executive Board also recognizes that reaching the poorest is neither automatic nor simply a matter of good will. Both time and necessary resources must be devoted to this objective.

4. In the name of its founder and in the name of very poor families whom he brought together and who today rely on UNICEF, the International Movement ATD Fourth World hopes that this objective of reaching the poorest can be strengthened.

The participation of the poorest: a question of knowledge and of partnership

5. Decision 1991/6, adopted by the UNICEF Executive Board last year, requests the continuation of efforts to raise permanently the level of participation of the poorest. It raises the issue of necessary conditions for the participation of men, women and children for whom endurance of great poverty for too long has shattered their self-confidence and their faith in the world around them. Decision 1991/6 closely links participation and knowledge. To promote participation, it is necessary to have a thorough knowledge of the identities, opinions and hopes of the very poor. The development of such knowledge constitutes the first step of a true partnership with the poorest.

6. Father Joseph knew from experience that the only knowledge which liberates the poorest is that which we develop with them, and that the participation of a population in great poverty must begin at the first stages of research.

Learning from programmes with the aim of reaching the poorest

7. Decision 1991/6 requests that UNICEF identify, analyse and share information learned from initiatives that have effectively reached the poorest children and their families. To respond to this request, it is necessary to study how UNICEF, Governments and non-governmental organizations endeavour to reach the poorest through their programmes. In order to accomplish this, the study would have to target precise initiatives and proceed with a rigorous evaluation of which programmes were successful in reaching the poorest and

why, what obstacles were encountered and which strengths were evident, what were the conditions for success and what lessons learned could assist all of UNICEF programmes.

8. Such a study could contribute to the seriousness of the response to the terms of decision 1991/6. We hope that UNICEF and the Executive Board will give this due consideration.